

## Textbook Revision and the Development of Common History Textbooks

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**Abstract:** From the perspective of the Georg Eckert Institute, the paper draws a line from “traditional” textbook revision to several attempts to develop common textbooks of different status and methodology – from jointly developed and approved textbooks to joint projects developing alternative or supplementary teaching units or materials. All of them have their restrictions and merits. More closely, the Franco-German endeavour is discussed. The History textbook series for higher secondary students is officially approved for use in France and in the German federal states. It does not focus on Franco-German relations but on general (European and national) history. It was realized, however, only because of strong political support. Due to long cooperation in the textbook sphere, the authors did rarely have to struggle with different interpretations of the past. More problematic was to bridge the different teaching traditions, curricula and examination requirements.

In the nineteenth century, in most parts of Western Europe, the state took over the control of education. History was introduced as a general subject, which fostered the understanding of the pupils to belong to a national community above their sphere of experience. Nationalism tended to enter the textbooks and the classrooms. Teaching was used to legitimate societal and power structure. Especially during times of war, strong chauvinistic attitudes against the neighbours appeared in the books, which promoted the own national claims and positions at the costs of others.

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This situation taken as a starting point, this paper will address three points:

- A brief look on textbook revision in general as a background of the development of joint textbooks,
- The attempt to differentiate between different approaches to develop joint history textbooks.
- Finally a more detailed look at the Franco-German textbook and its development.

### **Textbook revision**

Even in the nineteenth century, not all pedagogues supported the “national” orientation of education. Progressive educationalists argued for a pedagogy centred on the needs of a child instead of the education of obedient subjects. Additionally, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, conferences worldwide promoted education for peace.<sup>(1)</sup> Despite of this, those, “internationally minded” and peace oriented – the labour and peace movements –, had drawn the short straw against the “national”, chauvinistic forces in the societies who drove their states into the First World War. After that, the disastrous results kept in sight, the danger of chauvinism was obvious and in many societies peace orientation became stronger. Teacher associations and peace groups demanded that textbooks should be revised. Chauvinistic presentations, negative stereotypes of the neighbours and enemy images should be eliminated in order not to “poison” the minds of the young pupils (Schüddekopf, 1966, p. 11 f.).

Activities took place on international, multi-lateral and bi-lateral levels. In 1926, the League of Nations passed the so-called Casarès Resolution<sup>(2)</sup> asking for cooperation and revision in the textbook sphere. This resolution wasn’t successful, as it was not supported by follow-up activities. However, that the League of Nations took up this topic can be seen as a success in itself, and on other levels, activities were more promising. In 1919 already,

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(1) The World Peace Congress in Paris 1889, already, had argued for an education towards peace as did the “Parliament of World Religions” during the Chicago World Exhibition 1893. Other conferences on a global scale followed.

(2) Called after the Spanish representative Casarès, who introduced the resolution (cf. UNESCO, 1949, pp. 16-20).

the association “Norden” had been founded in the Scandinavian countries, comprising Denmark, Norway, Sweden and later Finland and Iceland. The “Norden” can be regarded as a model of international textbook cooperation. Backed by the educational authorities, all history textbooks had to pass a review by a “Joint Committee” before publication.

Beside other activities worldwide, also a Franco-German teachers association was founded in 1926 pressing for the betterment of the textbooks. They published theses or recommendations on Franco-German history with the aim to “decontaminate” the books.<sup>(3)</sup> The political situation in Germany prevented any implementation. However, it was this base from which the Franco-German textbook cooperation took off after the Second World War – by revising several of the theses<sup>(4)</sup>.

From the German perspective, the cooperation between Germany and France was one of the first bilateral textbook consultations after the war, starting in 1951, and one of the most intense.<sup>(5)</sup> French and German teachers and academic historians<sup>(6)</sup> reviewed the textbooks of the other side and discussed the perspectives, mostly arriving at mutually accepted interpretations. Results were recommendations how to present specific topics/periods of Franco-German shared history (and geography) in school textbooks. These recommendations mostly imply that the participants reached a common interpretation of history. The pre-war theses had also listed several occasions, where French and German scholars did not reach an accord. Together with the German-Polish Textbook Commission, which started to work in 1972, the Franco-German one is often seen as a model for successful textbook cooperation.

To organise activities in the field of textbook revision, an institute had been founded as clearing house in Braunschweig, Germany, already in 1951. It was named “International Institute for Textbook Revision”, then International Textbook Institute. Out of these roots, the “Georg Eckert

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(3) Probleme der deutsch-französischen Geschichtsschreibung. *Internationales Jahrbuch für Geschichtsunterricht* 1 (1951/52, pp. 44-64).

(4) Die Revision der Thesen von 1935 auf der deutsch-französischen Historikertagung im Mai 1951. *Internationales Jahrbuch für Geschichtsunterricht* 1 (1951/52, pp. 44-73).

(5) There was a gap in the meetings between 1967 and 1981, and at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the work shifted towards the production of web-based materials (“Deufamat”), before the focus shifted towards the joint Franco-German history textbook.

(6) In 1981, also Geography was included.

Institute for International Textbook Research” developed since 1975 as a state financed but independent research organisation<sup>(7)</sup>.

After 1990, additionally new challenges arose. When transforming their education system, some states of the former Eastern block were looking for advice for curricula and textbook development. In other countries, violent conflicts broke out, and agencies thought to intervene with the tools of textbook revision. In this context, several projects tried to develop common textbooks or teaching materials. Before, in practice, traditional textbook revision had tried to clear up the textbooks by getting rid of stereotypes, chauvinistic presentations and one-sided narrations, but did not touch the national character of education and textbooks.

### **The development of joint textbooks and teaching materials**

However, the idea to overcome state borders by multi-national textbooks was not new. Already in 1951, a prize for a “European textbook” was unsuccessfully advertised<sup>(8)</sup>. A first “European Textbook” was realized only in 1992, forty years later. But I will sketch this field more systematically.

Most of those common textbooks are developed with the intention to overcome divergent, and often conflicting, narrations of history in neighbouring states or of different communities within the political borders

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- (7) In Germany, after the Second World War, textbook revision took off with great impetus. It was influenced by several factors:
- the re-education and denazification by the allied authorities,
  - the greater impetus of the “internationally minded” in German (civil) society after the disastrous experiences of war, who worked in line with denazification policies,
  - the (West-)European focus, also of more conservative politicians in Germany, supporting activities that were favourable for Germany’s West integration and thus did support, not oppose, textbook revision.
  - Block confrontation, however, restricted successful activities on Germany’s western neighbours and new allies during the first decades and added points of tension in later years.
  - Additionally, international organisations, like UNESCO and the Council of Europe, asked for and supported textbook revision, as “wars begin in the minds of men”. These activities embedded the German bi-lateral efforts in an international framework.
- (8) It was offered by the Society for the Conferring of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen (“Auf dem Weg zu einem europäischen Geschichtsbuch”. Internationales Jahrbuch für Geschichtsunterricht, 1, 1951/52, 222).

of a state. Additionally, the books often intend to support modern approaches of History teaching. However, the results are rarely textbooks in the sense of books that are regularly employed in classroom teaching during a longer period, e.g. a school year. The reason is one of the main challenges of this kind of joint history projects: regular textbooks have to meet the state-controlled curricula and have in many cases to be approved – if they are not published – by the state. Because of this, many projects decided to publish additional teaching/learning materials on specific topics, but not textbooks covering the whole syllabus.

Different types of joint textbooks/materials can be distinguished:

- The joint, approved textbook series requires that it is backed by the governments, accepted as fitting the curricula and covers the whole content and objectives to enable regular use in the classrooms. To this type we will return, when we discuss the Franco-German textbook in detail.

- Non-approved international textbooks, like the “European textbook” published in 1992 (Delouche et al. 1992)<sup>(9)</sup>, are not for regular use. They are used mainly as supplementary materials in specific contexts. The plus is that the national narrative of the normal textbook can be enriched – or questioned – by a different perspective from abroad.

- Multilateral alternative textbooks try to “correct”, better to challenge dominant perspectives and fill blanks of the official discourses. They are supplementary materials, often the outcome of projects to overcome conflict situations. They take into account different perspectives and are often not in line with official or dominant public positions. This might restrict their use. The grade of acceptance might indicate the grade of overcoming the underlying conflict(s). For example, several of EUROCLIOs activities in the Balkans and Eastern Europe fall into this category (e.g. Mladenovski et al., n.d.).

- A special case is a bi-national alternative teaching material or book that was developed in a current conflict situation by the Peace Research Institute of the Middle East (PRIME, 2006). It does not intend to bridge the narratives of Palestinians and Israelis, but to make them aware of the existence of the narrative of the other side by telling the story in two

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(9) The book, written by 13 authors from different countries, covers the history of Europe from ancient times to the present era in twelve chapters and an introduction. The book has been translated into many European languages. See also Khan Banerjee & Stöber (2010).

versions. However, even this seems unacceptable to the authorities. The book was officially banned from classroom use by both sides.

- There are also additional multi- or bi-national materials on specific topics, sometimes the outcome of textbook cooperation of the traditional type, supplementing the recommendations. They intend to go deeper into a specific topic than textbooks can do and can be used alongside with the regular – national – textbook.

- Last, but not least there are bi- or multinational teaching guides, teacher handbooks or background information on difficult topics or joint history. They are often produced by academics, but the teacher him- or herself would have to transfer it for classroom use.

The joint textbook projects use different methods. The “European textbook”, for example, compiles narrations by several authors of different nationality on different periods. As the texts were mutually discussed among the authors, problematic content or representations could be eliminated. However, the differences of national perspectives are not discussed in the book, nor visible to the reader.

In other mutually developed teaching materials, the narrative is the outcome of a dialogue. However, different positions are visible and are pointed to by using sources reflecting different perspectives. As well the compromise narrative as the presentation of other views may be regarded as unacceptable by many readers in a conflict environment. Therefore, PRIME, as mentioned, replaced it by the dual-narrative approach. Even if this approach does not try to bridge the conflict lines, it faces also strong opposition.

As a last possibility, I just want to mention the pure source book or work book that does without any authoritative narration by the author(s). Only sources and tasks/questions to be answered by the students are given. Contextualization has to be developed in classroom discussions.

Thus, there are several approaches to supply identical textbooks (apart from the language) to pupils of different states or communities, often arising from textbook revision<sup>(10)</sup>.

In the third part of the paper, the development of the Franco-German history textbook will be looked at in detail.

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(10) Products that are made available on a globalized education market by internationally active publishing houses are not covered here.

### The Franco-German History Textbook<sup>(11)</sup>

In 2006, the world-first history textbook that was recognised as an official school textbook by two independent nation-states was published in two languages, but with the same content. It was a first volume of a series of three; the second volume appeared in 2008 and the third one is announced for spring 2011. Volume 1 will cover topics from Ancient history to Modern times; vol. 2 covers the period from the end of the 19th century to the Second World War and vol. 3, the first one that was published, history after 1945. The series is published by a well-known French textbook publisher, Nathan, and a German one, Klett. Nonetheless, the work was not the initiative of the two publishers.

Already in the 1930s, a French and a German historian had developed the idea to publish a common textbook on German-French relations. In the political atmosphere of that time, however, the idea was given up.

In 1963, a generation and a World War later, France and Germany signed a treaty on mutual friendship and cooperation. In the same year, the Franco-German Youth Office (*office franco-allemand pour la jeunesse*) was founded. In January 2003, this office organised a “Franco-German Youth Parliament” in Berlin to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the treaty. The Youths passed a resolution in which they demanded to introduce a History textbook with the same content in both countries “to reduce prejudices resulting from mutual misperception” (Claret, 2006, p. 58)<sup>(12)</sup>. These are the same aims, textbook revision had put forward for decades. The youths apparently took up an idea that was developed by promoters of Franco-German relations and mentioned in course of a speech during the sessions<sup>(13)</sup>.

The German chancellor and the French president supported this demand. In France, the ministry of education was responsible for further

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(11) For the following, see especially Claret (2006), Defrance (2009), Geiss (2006), and Riemenschneider (2006).

(12) Translated by Georg Stöber.

(13) Brigitte Sauzay, co-director of the Institute for Franco-German cooperation in Europe and later appointee of the (German) chancellor for Franco-German relations, and Rudolf von Thadden, history professor, the German co-director of the institute and coordinator for German-French relations at the Foreign Ministry, developed and promoted the idea (Riemenschneider, 2007, p. 85). Brigitte Sauzay died already in November 2003, after the project took off.

steps. However, in federal Germany, education is in the responsibility of the federal states. And their ministers of education do not appreciate other agencies to interfere. However, the official representative for Franco-German cooperation, the prime minister of the federal state Saarland, Peter Müller, also supported the idea strongly. Despite the doubts of the Standing Commission of the German Ministers of Education (an organisation to coordinate educational politics to some extent), he managed to convince the standing conference of the federal state prime ministers to agree to the project and to suggest the establishment of a bilateral working group of experts to conceptualize the book. This group was approved by all political levels involved and met the first time in July 2003. With this, the project was handed over from the politicians to the academic side – at least partially as politicians were also represented in the working group. Apart from historians, the French and German foreign office as well as the French education ministry and the German standing conference of education ministers participated.

Already when the idea was politically discussed, a small preparation group had decided to produce textbooks for Higher Secondary Classes. On this base, the expert group developed a project outline. At the end, at the beginning of 2005, nearly one year and a half after the establishment, the group published an invitation to tender, describing the concept of the book and the duties of the contractors. As in France and in Germany textbooks are published by private publishing houses. Also the writing and publishing of the Franco-German book was handed over to a tandem of a French and a German publishing house (Nathan and Klett). The houses had to guarantee to work in close cooperation. They chose five authors each according to their networks. However, the outcome of their work was also discussed with the expert group. At the end, in 2006, the first book was published – after only one year of publishing work and three years after the idea was born. The high symbolic value of the enterprise, which secured constant political and public interest, is behind this speed.

During this process, different issues arose and had to be solved by one or the other of the groups involved:

- Power question: Especially in Germany, the proposal “from above”, the federal level, is delicate. The federal states are autonomous in educational matters. The interference of the federal level and need to accept a product that could only be a compromise even before it was ready and could be checked, was something like an imposition.

With the book once published, different authorities foresaw difficulties to revise their curricula, as often after such a revision new books are required, but the Franco-German books would be on the market for some time, thus prohibiting major changes.

As the books should be produced for the last three years of secondary schooling, examination requirements have also to be met, especially where – as in France and some German states – central examinations take place.

- Divergent interpretations: It was valuable that real conflicting issues of mutual relationship had already been discussed and settled during several decades of textbook revision – as well as by a common academic discourse. Regarding the key topics, no conflicts of interpretation arose, and in general, typical opposing “national” interpretations seem inexistent nowadays. However, some political issues proved difficult, for example the relationship towards the USA, where France is quite critical, but Germany more positive, remembering “liberation” and economic and humanitarian support after the war. Instead of searching for a compromise, these different evaluations and their reasons were made the topic of discussion. Additionally, already the expert group realized that there were different meanings/connotations of specific terms (state, nation, culture, religion) in Germany and France, a different understanding of concepts that made translations difficult.

- Differences between curricula: With the decision to publish books for Higher Secondary Education, the problems of different school types with different levels and curricula existing side by side in Germany did not affect the project. Also at this stage, the curricula are more flexible, especially in Germany. In general, there was a high degree of accord between France and the many German states. Both countries follow an approach where they integrate their national history into a European context with some global aspects. The books try to meet the “national” requirements by adding two chapters for specific French and German history. Other chapters cover both countries or general European or (to a small extent) global developments. Thus as a new trait, the new books enable an interlocking of the historical developments in France and in Germany.

- Differences between concepts of history teaching: Despite general similarity, classroom teaching and also the concept of German and French textbooks differ. Whereas German textbook writers (and didactics) stress the power of judgement by the students, French textbooks centre on sound knowledge of methods and content and have a very strict pattern. The

concept developed in the Franco-German books resembles more the French model; it is criticized by some German educationalists and quite unfamiliar to the German learners. However, the authors and also some reviewers regard the French and German perspectives as complementary, as reflections have to be based on sound knowledge. Therefore, they value the books not only as a good compromise, but a combination of interdependent aspects.<sup>(14)</sup>

- Financial risk for publishers: As the development process was expensive for the publishers but it was far from being sure that the teachers would accept the new series as regularly used textbooks, it was unsure whether the publishers would cover their costs and make profit. To ensure the highly symbolic enterprise, the states had to subsidize the project by guaranteeing to buy a specific amount of books, which were distributed in the schools. The substantial selling rate of the books seems to a large part to be due to this subsidy.

Apart from the challenges arising from the bi-national character of the book, there are aspects, like the treatment of different topics, which gave rise to critics. This, however, is the case with any national textbook, too, and is in our context of no concern.

### Conclusion

For nearly a century, textbook revision had tried to “correct” the textbooks used at school without challenging their national character. During the last two decades, multiple joint projects of different type came up, which try to replace conflicting history interpretations by a compromise narrative and/or the inclusion of different perspectives applying modern ways of history teaching. The only bi-national regular textbook until now, however, which is officially approved, is the Franco-German history textbook series for higher secondary education. In this context, four points shall be stressed:

1. The books came into being because of the high symbolic nature of the project and the importance the political field attributes to it. This only made it possible to overcome the administrative and formal barriers between different education systems.

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(14) See Bendick (2009), Körber (2009), and Markocowitz & Pfeil (2006).

2. The book project tops decades of textbook cooperation, in which books were revised, problematic and conflictual aspects clarified and later common materials produced.

3. Remaining differences, which came up unexpectedly, were addressed and talked about in the books.

4. Despite these favourable conditions and subsidised distribution, in both countries the books are rarely used as regular textbooks, as deviations from the national standards are felt as shortcomings.

Thus, the publication of the Franco-German textbook series is a success, not so much an economic one for the publisher or an educational one by bringing the classrooms together, but a political one, demonstrating that it is possible to transcend the barriers erected by nation-state educational politics around their claims. But goodwill is needed from all sides.

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